



## Working-class Women's Political History

The general form of this course, like all of the Communist University courses, is that it is a selected set of original texts by revolutionary writers. The writer of this (attached and downloadable) text is not otherwise known to us. Her name is Janine Booth and the article was found on the plainly Trotskyist web site of a British publication called “Workers’ Liberty”. We must thank Janine Booth for her public scholarship.

Booth’s work assists us with a narrative of the years from the founding of the German Social Democratic Party in 1875, when Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were both still alive, alert, active and writing, up until the time, thirty to forty

years later, when the major initiative began to pass from the German Party to Lenin's Bolsheviks.

The revolutionary activities of the communists were prominent at different times in Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Russia, among many other countries. In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>, these revolutionary activities were much more massive in Germany than anywhere else; and it was in the German language, and in the revolutionary practice of the German communists, that the organised movement for the advancement of proletarian women, as part of the revolutionary struggle for communism, got under way and first reached a high stage of explicit development.

In our course we represent this period with singular texts from Engels, Zetkin, Kollontai, Luxemburg and Lenin. Some of the history of the period can be seen in these texts through the eyes of these revolutionary participants. Booth's text can help us to step back and think about some of the other participants, like August Bebel and Emma Ihrer, on the forms of organisation that the German Party used, and on the means of propaganda that were employed, such as the periodical founded by Ihrer and mainly edited by Zetkin, *Die Gleichheit* ("Equality").

We have to take Booth's word for it on the numbers that she gives, and on most of the detail that she relates. We do not have an Internet archive of *Die Gleichheit*, or even a single article from it. Booth's article as reproduced here has no

references or bibliography. These are some of the kinds of reasons why, in general, we have normally preferred to use original writings for the Communist University.

In the case of this article, some of it has been removed for the sake of brevity, and where the points made are covered by our other material. Remarks about Rosa Luxemburg's alleged indifference towards women's particular position in society are less useful than Luxemburg's own text, for example, which we give in the next part. Comrades can go to the web site to read Booth's full article, if they wish.

Part of what our course is asserting is that the proletarian women's cause has been the occasion of major historical events, and that it also comprises a substantial body of thought. In the process we are overturning the tacit and sometimes explicit historiography of the bourgeois feminists.

We are identifying our own struggles against bourgeois feminism with the struggles that took place in this earlier time, between the days of Marx and Lenin, and in the days of Luxemburg and Lenin.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [German Socialism and the 'woman question', Booth, 2005](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).